

**THE GOVERNOR'S
PREVENTING CRIME
IN VIRGINIA'S
MINORITY COMMUNITIES
TASK FORCE REPORT**



Executive Summary

Commonwealth of Virginia
March 22, 2005

I. Executive Summary

Governor Mark R. Warner's Task Force on Preventing Crime in Virginia's Minority Communities was established in July 2003. Its purpose has been to identify or develop strategies for reducing crime in primarily minority communities. His firm belief that no program to reduce and prevent crime could succeed without the full involvement of the people in the community is reflected in the ethnically diverse, multi-cultural, and geographically diverse membership of this Virginia Task Force.

The Task Force was charged with developing and recommending strategies to reduce crime in minority communities and with identifying programs that are effective in preventing crime. Those recommendations are set forth in this Final Report with the hope that all Virginia localities facing crime in their minority communities will find useful, practical suggestions throughout. Likewise, the Report is also directed at state government and the agencies responsible for developing effective criminal justice policies, procedures, and practices.

The Task Force conducted four community forums throughout the state to hear first hand from local leaders, citizens, and experts about crime problems in minority communities and ways to prevent and reduce them.

Speakers at the meetings included elected and appointed officials, law enforcement professionals and prosecutors, and corrections professionals, including probation officers, and others working in community corrections and post-release programs. Additional speakers represented the experiences of federal and state government in providing resources to address crime issues. Most important was the extensive representation of local government in urban, suburban, and rural localities throughout and beyond Virginia. This group included mayors and other city officials, social services professionals, code enforcement officials, and others. Educators and youth were represented in the form of school principals and counselors and various youth services workers both in education and in community service organizations.

Virginia is fortunate to have many communities who have successfully organized themselves to improve their own ability to prevent and resist crime. Such cities and counties offered their own lessons and recommendations to the Task Force and, through this report, to other localities facing similar problems. Building community coalitions is a cornerstone of crime prevention. Time-tested concepts such as the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CEPTED) principles and community policing are strategies included as Task Force recommendations.

Community-based practices in both law enforcement and corrections have played prominent roles in decreasing the overall crime rate of the past 20 years. This report recognizes the need to fulfill the commitment to these programs through increased state funding and the subsequent reduction of caseloads.

Likewise, new ways of dealing with system- involved individuals, such as Drug Court Treatment Programs, should be available on a statewide basis in order to fulfill their promise. Newer models like Youth Court should be further explored and evaluated to determine their long-term benefit.

Successful local programs have taught us that educational and employment opportunities for both youth and adults are also closely related to preventing crime or supporting offender re-entry subsequent to incarceration.

Significant cultural and language barriers continue to exist in many parts of the state. Progress has been made; however, cultural sensitivity training for system professionals and education of all community members is a continuing need. The state needs to continue its work on the issue of biased-based policing. In the long term, only the concerted recruitment of minority individuals at all levels of government will increase the communication that is necessary in order to prevent crime and protect individuals in all Virginia communities.

Officials at both state and local levels have adopted those practices that draw upon the strengths of partners from the public and private sectors. Still, not all Virginians have shared equally in the benefits of reduced crime. Citizens of minority communities in the Commonwealth have been victimized at significantly higher rates than the majority of Virginians. In addition, minority populations are, in some cases, significantly over-represented among those arrested for crimes. Concern has been expressed that social conditions such as poverty, unemployment, or poor school attendance that are present in some minority communities contribute to this disparity.

The Task Force's Final Report provides considerable detail about the community forums and is intended to be a learning experience and a resource in its own right for all Virginia communities.